PAL
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MUS

EIGHT YEARS

OF

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

IN

BATTIR

VILLAGE

BY

HASAN MUSTAFA

BATTIR

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BATTIR

Battir is a living example of what a community can do to help itself. This village on one of the hills "round about Jerusalem" overlooks a fertile valley which in former times was theirs to cultivate. It was reached by train from Jerusalem, six miles away. It was the last stop on the long line which reached from Cairo to Lydda and Jaffa on the plains, and on to the hill country topped by Jerusalem. Here it was the travellers from far lands began to watch for their first sight of the Holy City and the villagers waved happily in greeting to them as they passed through, faces pressed to the windows for glimpses of the local scene.

A good fountain on the side of the hill furnished water for the homes built above the valley, and the farm land was irrigated from springs which flowed from the mountain to the places below. Special train service daily enabled the people to take their produce to the Jerusalem markets and Battir was a household word, not only in Jerusalem but in the surrounding villages for the quality of its fruits and vegetables.

There was no unemployment in Battir. With a population of just over one thousand there was something for all to do. The men of the village had ample opportunities for work. One third of them were employed in many capacities in connection with the railway and trains service; one third followed the building trade in and around Jerusalem, which between the wars was a lucrative

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With the Compliments

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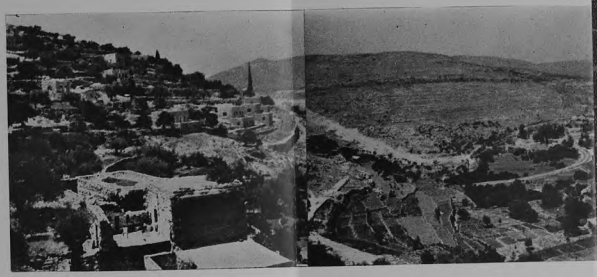

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one; the remaining third, cultivated the land. Enjoying as it did all the benefits of communication and transportation, the people of Battir were fully integrated into the life of Palestine and life was remarkably secure and happy.

Then came "The Troubles" of 1948 followed by the establishment of the fateful Demarcation Line in 1949 and contact with the outside world ceased. Train service stopped, Jerusalem was inaccessible, and most disastrous of all, half of its land was on the other side of the line, the land which was its source of food and livelihood. Now the nearest towns were Bethlehem and Hebron, but there was only a rough mountain road to the main highway six-and-a-half kilometers away. Almost overnight, they were like people cast adrift on a dark ocean. Days were filled with frustration and nights closed down dark, lonely, and fearful.

During the first weeks they managed to get along, and there was always the hope that peace would come soon and life would be secure, busy, and happy again. But the day passed into months and the effect of isolation, loss of income, of health and educational services began to be reflected in bitterness and unhappiness. Something needed to be done if this village was to be saved.

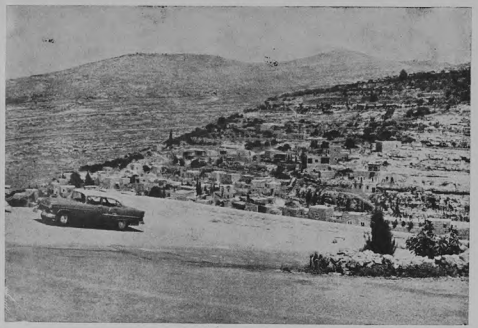
It happened that Battir at that time had a Village Son, a college graduate and a social worker, who held an important post with UNRWA. He watched with dismay the tragedy which threatened his village and decided to act.

First of all, the people needed to have something to do. Then they needed a better water supply, and food. The first was not easy to manage as materials were hard to get, but by April, 1950 a reconstruction of the fountain was started. All helped who could and it was ready in December in time for the first big winter rains. Food, however, had to be brought in and that was almost impossible at times because in winter the one road was impassable. But communication had to be established again, and soon the Village Son was planning for a road. Making a 6 1/2 kilometer stretch of road was an ambitious project. He appealed to UNRWA to provide funds for the making of a simple road so that this Organization could deliver rations allocated for frontier villages and he assured UNRWA that the villagers would do their part. They set to work with a will. It was a weary, back-breaking task to build a road over a rocky mountain with inadequate equipment, but a much better road was eventually made than was originally planned and the men rejoiced in gaining new skills as they blasted rocks, laid pavements, and spread asphalt. The work begun in August, 1950, was carried on through the hot summer months and by December it was ready for use. The glow of achievement, fanned by wise leadership, kindled the flame which was to burn steadily for the next eight years and transform Battir.

The following pages tell the stroy of these eight years of community effort and show how step by step the people improved the health, education, and communications of the village and brought about a sense of civic pride which has restored the innate dignity of a rural community by self-reliant people.

A Road and Fountain Restored Security and a Sense of Community 1950 - 1951

The construction of a road began on Agust 13th, 1950, and was the link again with the outside world. The sense of isolation was lifted. A gravel road was first built but before the hard rains of winter set in it was asphalted, and it has stood the test of the years well.



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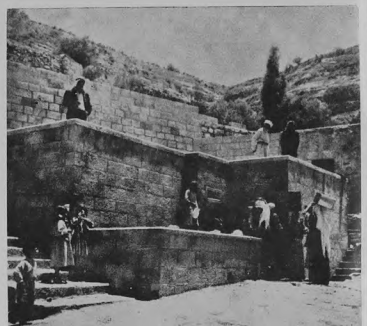


Water assures the security, health, and happiness of the people.

The fountain assured water to the people, to carry them through the hard dry months of the summer with some left over for the terraced hills that was their only remaining farm land.

A copious fountain flows continually

A happy scene at the Battir fountain

Girls Education Introduced in 1952

There was a school for boys in the Mandate days but none for girls. As parents did not like to send their daughters to Jerusalem to school, education for them was a matter for the homes. This had been adequate for the old days but a new era demanded something more. After months of effort they called on UNRWA for help and a school was opened on February 6th., 1952 in a room adjacent to the spring. From the first, this was a popular project and the girls themselves helped to prepare the room and the court. By autumn of the same year two more rooms were prepared and added to the school.

Within five years, Battir Girls' School consisted of seven rooms, eight teachers, and eight classes with every girl of school age in the village enrolled. When the first girl to get married after completing the course had her wedding, the procession started from this school.

The girls watch while their parents work, voluntarily on the new school building.

Part of the school buildings.

The school girls learn home nursing at the clinic.

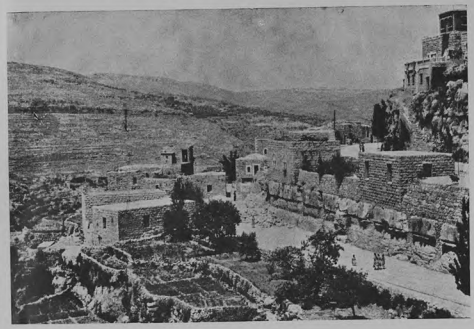
A good book is a good companion.

Home economics has its place in the curriculum.

Road - Making inside the Village, 1952.

The road linking the spring with the main road through the village was paved in April, 1952.

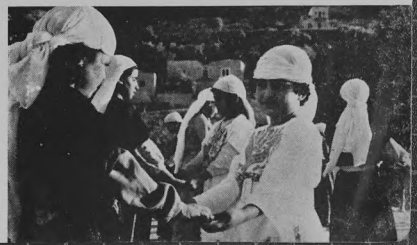
Work on the opening of a road linking the spring with the fields was begun in June, 1953 and completed in November.



A successful union of road-making and terracing.

Water from the Fountain Flows into the Pool.

In August, 1954 the people began building steps from the fountain to the pool. This is one of the most attractive spots in the village, and rightly so, for water is their most precious asset and the life of the village.



Country Dances in a happy community.

An ancient arch, a traditional scene, and a centuries old fountain reflect the charm and beauty of a rural community.

Telephone 1955 - The Post Office.

It was a big day in Battir, August, 1955, when the Post Office was established and the first public telephone service installed. This ended any feeling of isolation for they were now connected with the world outside, even at night. Night no longer closed down on them "as a dark sea".

Through the door of this building the village is connected with the outside world.

The Road of the Seven Widows.

Building roads inspired the people to improve the paths between their houses and the main roads. In one corner of the village seven widows were living out their remaining years. They decided to make their paths easier so started a road. When the men of the village saw them, they hastened to help and now the Road of the Seven Widows is one of the most loved spots in the town exemplifying community spirit at its best.

The road of the seven widows.

Practical Arts Have Their Place.

In the winter of 1957, a Sewing Centre was opened in a former guest house. A good road was made to it on the top of the hill. The young women of Battir make school uniforms and dresses of all kinds, learn needle-work, knitting, and other skills as they acquire the art of dressmaking.

A new interest and a new skill.

Girls of Battir look upon their sewing centre as "The Temple of the Maidens".

Hand-work and the machine meet in the sewing class.

A clinic and a child-welfare centre.

Development of Public Health and Town Planning.

On the 2nd of September, 1957 the village celebrated the opening of its clinic, which provided medical service. In the autumn of the same year, 186 sanitary units were put up to ensure cleanliness and to protect the health of the community.

The village enjoys the benefit of well planned, well constructed, and well paved streets.

At the same time, the villagers repaired all village streets and squares and covered them with asphalt in the best modern method, and turned manure piles into public gardens.

A goat-track widened out into a thoroughfare in Battir.

"A garden is a lovesome spot"

A beautiful garden blossoms where once a manure pile stood.

A Community Centre is Opened.

Early in 1958, an ancient building was converted into a hall for meetings and lectures.

The Pool is Repaired.

In March, 1958, in order to provide an adequate supply of water for irrigation, to beautify the village, and make the gardens more fruitful, the pool was repaired.

Tree Planting.

During the past eight years, 16,000 forest trees have been planted within the town planning area, promising for the future, shade, beauty, and perennial greenness.

A Public Playground

One of the most ambitious projects of the community was the provision of a public playground above the village off the main road. It was no small achievement to level an area big enough for football games and other sports from a rough, stony, and steep hill. Its opening was the occasion for a big celebration which the village shared with many friends from outside. This makes possible an all round education for the young people, education of the mind, the body, and the spirit.

The playing field almost ready for games

Eight Years of Achievement.

As the people of Battir took stock of their accomplishments at the end of eight years, they launched a campaign to conserve their gains and dedicated themselves to the future development of their lovely village. They are proud of their growth in eight years, for what they have put into Battir in labour and effort of all kinds, constitutes a considerable sum. However, the larger values cannot be estimated in dinars. If they achieved miracles it was due to the God-given spirit of cooperation, "God's Hand of Blessing is on the Group working together". They can rightly look to the future with hope for they have demonstrated what can be done if a happy community spirit exists, and they can look forward with confidence to continued progress and further development.

BATTIR - JORDAN. JULY, 1959

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